



## New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Grant to Aid Pinelands Growth Communities** *Pinelands Commission to Promote Smart Growth Through New Program*

NEW LISBON, NJ - The New Jersey Pinelands Commission will further smart growth initiatives through the generous support of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. The Foundation has awarded a \$187,000 grant to support the Commission's Pinelands Excellence Program, an initiative to foster an innovative planning and site design process with two regional Growth Area Communities. The goal of this effort is to develop prototypical approaches that can enable Regional Growth Area communities within the Pinelands to effectively absorb growth while maintaining and enhancing a high quality of life.

In establishing the Pinelands over 20 years ago, the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan called for the preservation of important ecological habitats, agricultural areas and cultural resources. In addition to establishing areas for preservation, the Plan identified those areas suitable for development, based on existing land use and development, areas of economic growth and future trends. The Regional Growth Areas are designed to accommodate future growth and are "receiving areas" for the transfer of development rights under the Pinelands Development Credit Program. The population of Regional Growth Area municipalities has increased by as much as 69 percent between 1990 and 2000, and the pace of development has posed challenges to planning in advance of continued development pressures.

The *Pinelands Excellence Program* will serve as a pilot program in two yet-to-be-selected Pinelands municipalities that are experiencing development and growth pressures. Under the program, the Pinelands Commission and a nationally renowned planning consultant will work with all levels of government to develop prototype recommendations that will help create livable communities. Each community will develop a strategic vision for its future and prepare specific recommendations for zoning, subdivision, site planning and infrastructure improvements for achieving a "livable" community.

Prototypes will set specific goals and objectives that address issues such as village centers, neighborhood character, affordable housing, open space and recreation, protection of important natural and scenic features, improved circulation, non-motorized transportation, stormwater management, and historic and cultural resources.

Because many New Jersey municipalities face the challenges of suburban sprawl, the *Pinelands Excellence Program* seeks to create model strategies that are replicable and can help to systemically improve local zoning and development practices throughout New Jersey.

## Pinelands Excellence Program

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“It’s a great honor that the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation has selected the *Pinelands Excellence Program* for funding under their 2001 Critical Issues grant program,” said Annette Barbaccia, Executive Director of the New Jersey Pinelands Commission. “Helping these communities to address the direct and indirect effects of accelerated growth is a primary objective of the Commission. In addition to the grant, the Commission has cited this objective as a priority in its current review of the Comprehensive Management Plan.”

On behalf of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, David Grant, Executive Director, conveyed these thoughts in awarding the grant, “We share the understanding that this grant will contribute significantly to stemming the loss of Pinelands acreage, especially that which results from uninformed planning and insufficient use of a wide variety of ‘smart growth’ methods.”

At the January 29<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Pinelands Municipal Council, comprised of Mayors from throughout the Pinelands region, Pinelands Commission staff delivered a presentation to the group providing an overview of the program. The Municipal Council, which will play an important role in this effort, agreed to work with the Commission in four key areas:

- drafting an RFP/Scope of Work for the planning consultant;
- selection of a consultant;
- participation in selection of two municipalities; and
- dissemination of lessons learned.

The consulting firm, to be selected through a national competition, will work with the Municipal Council to evaluate proposals from municipalities for participation in the program and will lead the community visioning, planning and design process. The Pinelands Commission also hopes that Governor McGreevey’s newly created Smart Growth Commission can lend its expertise to the project.

*The Pinelands Excellence Program* will have a strong educational component to ensure that community leaders throughout the Pinelands and the entire State will become better informed about opportunities for better community planning practices and results. A partnership-based approach will encourage the active participation of environmental, civic, business and other interests in collaboration with State, county, local and regional planners.

*The Pinelands Excellence Program* will establish a *Pinelands Excellence Awards Program* to publically recognize municipalities that incorporate the Program’s planning, zoning and design principles into their ordinances and activities.

“The *Pinelands Excellence Program* will have positive, far-ranging impacts on the character of developing areas in the Pinelands region,” Barbaccia said. “It’s our hope and expectation that this program will strongly benefit the long-term protection of Pinelands ecosystems and provide significant quality-of-life improvements for Pinelands residents.”

The project is estimated to take 16 months